

EXPOSITION OF ISAIAH

Message #11

(Part #1)

Isaiah 6:1-4

When we come to the **sixth chapter of Isaiah**, we come to one of the most famous and sacred of texts that God has ever put in His inspired Word. F. C. Jennings said this chapter should be approached with absolute 'reverence' (*Studies in Isaiah*, p. 59).

Whenever there is a transition from one political leader to another, there are usually some uncertainties and questions and insecurities that can even exist with God's people. **It is right at that moment when God's people need to realize God is on His throne . It is right at that moment when God's people need Isaiah 6 .**

Outlining the chapter of **Isaiah 6** has never been much of a problem, but interpreting and understanding what is in **Isaiah 6** is a majestic challenge. We may outline the chapter into four parts:

(Part #1) - Isaiah has a lofty vision of the Lord. **6:1-4**

(Part #2) - Isaiah has a humble response to the vision of the Lord. 6:5

(Part #3) - Isaiah is completely cleansed by an angel of the Lord. 6:6-7

(Part #4) - Isaiah is Divinely commissioned to proclaim a message from the Lord. 6:8-13

Outlining the chapter has never been much of a problem, but there are at least three interpretive problems with the chapter that aren't so easy to dissect.

(Interpretive Problem #1) - When did Isaiah actually get this vision?

The interpretive problem may be understood this way - Did Isaiah minister in the first five chapters and then get the vision after chapter 5, or did he receive this vision before the first five chapters and really chapter 6 should begin the book?

Did Isaiah minister the Word of God starting in chapter 1 and then received his special commission in chapter 6, or did he received his commission in chapter 6 before he started to minister in chapter 1?

Some of the old Jewish interpreters and a good number of Christian interpreters believe that Isaiah received his commission in chapter 6 before he began ministering in chapter 1 and that he just gives us a report of that commission here. But there are also a group of Biblical scholars who do not see it that way and I tend to side with them.

When you read of this vision in chapter 6, you would naturally expect that it would start the book of Isaiah. But it obviously doesn't and didn't. I do not think this is a small, mute point. Obviously God inspired His Word and He put this vision and commission in chapter 6, which means if we take it chronologically and literally, it happened after the first 5 chapters. We cannot just presumptuously assume that there is no chronological order here and we certainly are on safe ground assuming God put this in Isaiah exactly when it happened.

I tend to believe that **Isaiah had been ministering faithfully during the reign of Uzziah and then, in the year Uzziah died, his prophetic ministry went to another level in his grasp of the greatness of God and the sinfulness of himself.** This became a key turning point that would affect his ministry for the rest of his life. He had seen visions and had communicated truth, but here is where he gets his Divine commission. It is kind of like what happen to D. L. Moody. Dr. Ironside said D. L. Moody was preaching to others long before he had a clear grasp of salvation by grace; but when the Spirit of God ultimately brought Mr. Moody to the place that he understood it, his ministry went to another level (*Isaiah*, p. 37).

We may certainly conclude this when we read the opening verse of **Isaiah 6** and see that Isaiah had this vision “in the year of King Uzziah’s death.” King Uzziah reigned in Judah from 790-739 B.C. He had been, generally speaking, a good king. Uzziah became king at age 16 and reigned for 52 years (II Chronicles 26:1). He was a king who initially did right in the sight of God and just as II Chronicles 26:5 said, “as long as he sought the LORD, God prospered him.” Dr. Harry Bultema said, “After Solomon, Uzziah had been the most powerful king of Judah” (*Commentary on Isaiah*, p. 91).

Certainly the first chapters of Isaiah describe a time of great prosperity and great lax for Judah. God gave Uzziah victory over the Philistines and Arabs and Ammonites (II Chron. 26:7-8). Uzziah was a great builder and even made war engines (II Chron. 26:15) and he became famous.

But eventually, he became so proud of himself that he went into the temple and decided to offer his own sacrifices. He arrogantly thought he could replace God’s priests and God leveled him. He struck him down with leprosy (II Chron. 26:16-23) and ultimately that is how his life ended in 739 B.C. When Uzziah died, so did much of the national glory of Israel and as F. C. Jennings said, that glory has never been recovered to this very day (*Studies in Isaiah*, p. 60).

It is our belief that Isaiah lived and ministered through much of this. The first five chapters took place when Uzziah was reigning and things were prosperous and life was being lived with a less and less focus on God, but chapter 6 takes place the year Uzziah dies. This was the year that God gave Isaiah this vision. This was a time when Isaiah and Israel needed this vision.

If ever there is a time when God’s people need the comfort of knowing that God is sovereign, it is when one political leader has just left and another has just taken over. When you think your whole world has just collapsed, it is right at this moment when God’s people need to remember, it is **God who is on the Throne of the world.** This world is not governed by some prime minister, king or president. These leaders are God’s puppets. It is God who is running the world. It is God who is running your world.

(Interpretive Problem #2) - How did Isaiah see the Lord when Scripture says no man may see God and live? 6:1 (Exodus 33:18-20; John 1:18; I Tim. 6:16)

The answer to this one is easy because according to John 12:41, Isaiah saw the glory of Jesus Christ, God the Son, not God the Father. In other words Isaiah saw God in a theophany, a preincarnate appearance of Jesus Christ.

When you look down through this chapter and see just the names Isaiah uses for Jesus Christ - “Lord” (Adonai) (v. 1, 8, 11); “LORD of hosts” (Jehovah Sabaoth) (v. 3, 5); “the King” (the Melek) (v. 5); “the LORD” (Jehovah) (v. 12), plus he hears “Holy, Holy, Holy” - it becomes very clear that **Jesus Christ is the God of Glory**. Isaiah is seeing Jesus Christ, the second member of the Trinity in all of His glory. The full visible manifestation of God, which we are permitted to see, is Jesus Christ. He is the fullness of the Godhead in bodily form and this is the One who Isaiah sees.

(Interpretive Problem #3) - Was Isaiah actually in the temple of Jerusalem when he received the vision?

There is some question as to whether or not Isaiah was at the temple in Jerusalem at the time of this vision. Many believe he was, but some believe he didn't necessarily have to be at the temple, but could have even had this vision at his own home. This is a tough issue, but it seems to me that there is good reason to believe that Isaiah was at the temple, because he alludes to things he saw in connection with it **(6:1, 4)**.

Isaiah had probably gone to the temple to draw near to God when King Uzziah had died, and ultimately this action would show Isaiah that the prophetic plan of God and the prophetic calling of God on Isaiah's life is rooted in the heaven and was not contingent upon an earthly king. God had taken Uzziah out of the world, but God was going to leave Isaiah in the world and He wanted Isaiah to have a clear grasp of sacred things.

Now today, we want to look at the first part of Isaiah's vision in the first four verses. The contextual point of the text seems to be this:

IN TIMES OF POLITICAL AND PERSONAL THREAT, GOD'S PEOPLE NEED TO REALIZE THAT THE HOLY SOVEREIGN GOD IS STILL ON THE THRONE OF ALL THE EARTH.

What exactly is it that gives a guy like Isaiah the nerve and the right to confront the political leaders of his day and actually start pronouncing “woe” judgments on an entire nation? Where did he get his amazing courage and knowledge? The answer is he got this as a commission and call of God. This was a turning point in Isaiah's life. This gave Isaiah's prophetic ministry more power than it had ever had. He began with a true, lofty view of the Holy God.

As we will see in this chapter, Isaiah was not a perfect man; in fact, he was an unclean sinner. But God is in the business of calling those who are unclean sinners to be His ambassadors. He delights in cleaning them up to do a work for Him. **But one critical key to this is that the one who will be greatly used by God will realize how holy and how sovereign God is and how far short of His glory we truly are.**

It was in that context of Uzziah dying that Isaiah recognized that **regardless who Judah's king was, God was still on His Sovereign throne as King of the world**. The reason why this is so important to see is for this reason - God does not in any way actually commission someone for great things who does not recognize His sovereign majesty and greatness.

People who will be greatly used by God have a high and holy grasp of the Sovereignty of God. This world may have bizarre leadership, but remember this - God is still sovereign and still on His throne.

VISION PART #1 – Isaiah receives a lofty vision of the Lord. **6:1-4**

As we said, many believe that this vision occurred when Isaiah was at the temple in Jerusalem. Uzziah had died and Isaiah was probably wondering what would happen to Israel and to him in view of the threatening vision that he had in the first five chapters. As John Oswalt said, when Uzziah died for Judah it was a ‘hopeless situation’ (*Isaiah*, p. 126). So Isaiah did exactly what any should do, go to the place where you can meet with God, which would have been at the temple. **If Isaiah were at the temple, then of all the people there, Isaiah would have been the only one who actually was there seeing God.** He would have been the only one there in real attune with God.

Just because a bunch of people go to church does not mean they really understand the Word of God. In fact, it is probably the minority, not the majority who actually can rightly unravel what is in Scripture. Isaiah was one who could.

But there is a good applicable point to make here. When we have uncertainties and doubts and concerns and we wonder what will happen to us or to the world, the one place we need to go is to a place where we can meet with God. I have always believed the one place people should go when stressed is to church to hear from God by hearing the Word of God. As the precious Word is opened, you get to hear from God and see His will. God is still in the business of showing His people great things, glorious things, even when times are tough, when they are in His Word. When things are dark and bleak, it is time to meet with God and that is exactly what Isaiah did.

As near as I can determine, Isaiah specifically saw six amazing sights:

(Sight #1) - He saw the Lord sitting on a throne lofty and exalted. **6:1a**

Isaiah saw the Lord sitting on His Throne, lofty and exalted. This is important. Isaiah was not seeing Jesus Christ in His humiliation here, hanging on a cross, nor did He see Him after His ascension, sitting on the right hand of His Father’s throne. Isaiah is seeing Jesus Christ sitting on His throne. Isaiah is seeing the time when Jesus Christ is reigning in all of His glory over the entire world.

When you are disillusioned and distressed, don’t look at the human leaders of this world, look up to the Lord who is still on His throne. Human political leaders think they are so honored, so high and mighty. Presidential inaugural parades are designed to be so stately and sublime. None of this compares to the majesty of Jesus Christ sitting on His Throne. There is coming a day when every knee will bow before this King and every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord and He will be worshipped and praised as the One who is truly lofty and exalted.

(Sight #2) - He saw the Lord’s train filling the temple. **6:1b**

As Dr. Edward Young said this is a scene of “glorious majesty” (*The Book of Isaiah*, Vol. 1, p. 238). The long, Kingly robe and skirt of His royal robe was filling the temple. The entire temple was filled with the glory of Jesus Christ.

I was recently asked if I thought that when we got to heaven we could go up and shake hands with Jesus Christ. My answer was this - No one is just going to walk up to Jesus Christ and do anything. He will be on His throne in all of His majesty and royalty and the only way any of us will do anything in connection with Him will be by His permission.

His is the ultimate royalty. This is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Just the glory of His robe fills the temple.

(Sight #3) - He saw Seraphim angels of the Lord. **6:2**

What is very interesting about this is that there are no formal introductions made to Isaiah. Somehow, at the Throne of God, Isaiah not only sees the angels, but he knows they are called "Seraphim," which comes from a Hebrew word that means to burn which most commentators believe is connected to the burning, consuming, fiery holiness of God.

The Seraphim are only mentioned here in the Scriptures and appear to be very high ranking, holy angels who are located at the Throne of God, who specifically seem to continually praise, honor and worship God at His throne and see to it that those at the throne are pure. As Dr. Ryrie said, "All we know about this rank of angelic being is found in **Isaiah 6:2-7**" (*Basic Theology*, p. 129).

They are beings who have a real face and feet and real personalities. They obviously can talk and move. Each one has six wings; two cover his face, and two cover his feet and two wings fly.

These Seraphim obviously have a tremendous reverence and awe for God because they use two of their wings to cover their face. It would seem from this text that one of the primary responsibilities of the Seraphim is to see to it that no unclean person would have access to God until he has been purified.

(Sight #4) - He saw one Seraphim call out to another Seraph. **6:3**

These Seraphim continually communicate two main messages which Isaiah saw and heard:

Message #1 - The Seraphim call out Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD of hosts.

King David said that in God's Temple, "everything" speaks of God's glory (Psalm 29:9) and never is that more evident than when Isaiah sees the Throne of God.

The Hebrew word "Holy", which is repeated three times, is 'qadosh,' which is the word normally used as an attribute of God. This is a favorite Hebrew word of the prophet Isaiah. When used here it describes, as Young said, a sacred, perfect majestic holiness which separates God from all of His creation (*The Book of Isaiah*, Vol. 1, p. 242). **The repetition of the word three times has, even from ancient times, been taken to mean a reference to the Trinity. All three members of the Godhead have this totally separate level of majestic holiness.**

There are many who talk about Jesus Christ as if He were just a buddy you go to the beach with or you talk to any way you want. That is not the way it is and that is not the way it will be. Jesus Christ is Holy God and when you go into the presence of Him, you will not ever be flippant or light in your perspective of Him.

Message #2 - The Seraphim call out that the whole earth is full of God's glory.

God's glory is majestically on display at His throne, but it is visibly on display in His world. I want you to carefully observe the statement in **verse 3**; the glory of God is not just on display in all the land of Israel, but in the "whole earth." Isaiah was seeing something here that was revolutionary. God's glory wasn't only displayed in Israel's Promised Land; it was displayed in all the earth. Now the complete fulfillment of this has not yet happened for all of creation groans and suffers for the moment when God's glory will fill the whole earth (Romans 8:20-22). But there is a sense in which God's glory can be seen in every part of the universe.

What is God's glory here on this earth? It is anything and everything that reveals His attributes and His person in this created universe. Every part of the world has displays of the glory of God, so that men are without excuse (Romans 1:20).

Obviously the Seraphim don't have any trouble seeing the glory of God in this world; the problem is with humans seeing the glory of God in this world. Humans try to remove God's glory from everything. But the attributes of God are visibly on display every day in this universe. Every time you see light and darkness come and go you see the glory of God. Every time you are able to look, touch, taste and hear, you see the glory of God.

(Sight #5) - He saw the foundations of the temple doorposts shake . **6:4a**

God does not just have authority over the earth, but sovereign, majestic, awe-inspiring authority over the temple. Whenever someone truly grasps the glory of God or actually comes to terms with the truth of the Word of God, there will always be a reverent trembling.

May I be so bold as to say, in any church of God where the Word of God is carefully and clearly spoken, the atmosphere will be one of tremendous reverence. You will not find people running around this temple listening to a drum and electric guitar trying to interest young people. You will find all with their heads bowed in total quiet reverence.

(Sight #6) - He saw the temple filled with smoke . **6:4b**

God typically revealed His glory with heavenly smoke (Exodus 33:9). Why smoke? John Calvin tackled that question and said there were basically two reasons God manifested Himself and His glory via smoke:

- 1) God did it for His secret purposes which are totally left to Him.
- 2) God did it to cause terror to strike into the heart of man.

We cannot breath, move, see or live apart from God.

Before any of us can properly serve God, we must properly see God. What I mean by that is this; we must see God for who He reveals Himself to be and He reveals Himself to be the sovereign, majestic God who is high and lifted up and is Holy, Holy, Holy.

When you see God for who He is, you will see yourself for who you are.